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Simpson et al.

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(54) **MOBILE INVENTORY RACK APPARATUS
AND INVENTORY RACK SYSTEM**

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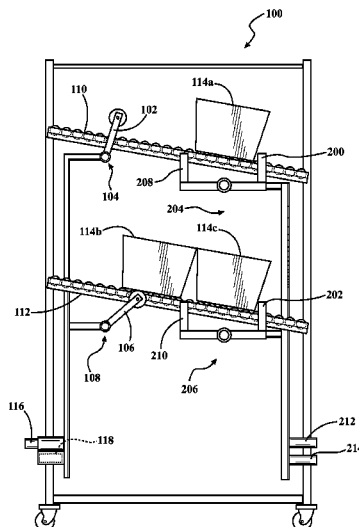
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USPC 414/268, 270, 274, 277, 276; 211/183,
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ABSTRACT

An inventory rack system and a mobile inventory rack apparatus are disclosed. The mobile inventory rack apparatus includes an inventory conveyor configured to translate articles of inventory and a receiving system including a requirement indicator disposed along the inventory conveyor. The requirement indicator has an inventory required state when not in contact with an article of inventory. The mobile inventory rack apparatus further includes a supply system including a pair of spaced stoppers disposed along the inventory conveyor. Each stopper has an extended position preventing translation of the articles of inventory and a retracted position allowing translation of the articles of inventory. The inventory conveyor is configured to receive at least one article of inventory when the requirement indicator is in the inventory required state and to allow removal of at least one article of inventory when one of the stoppers is in the retracted position.

20 Claims, 4 Drawing Sheets



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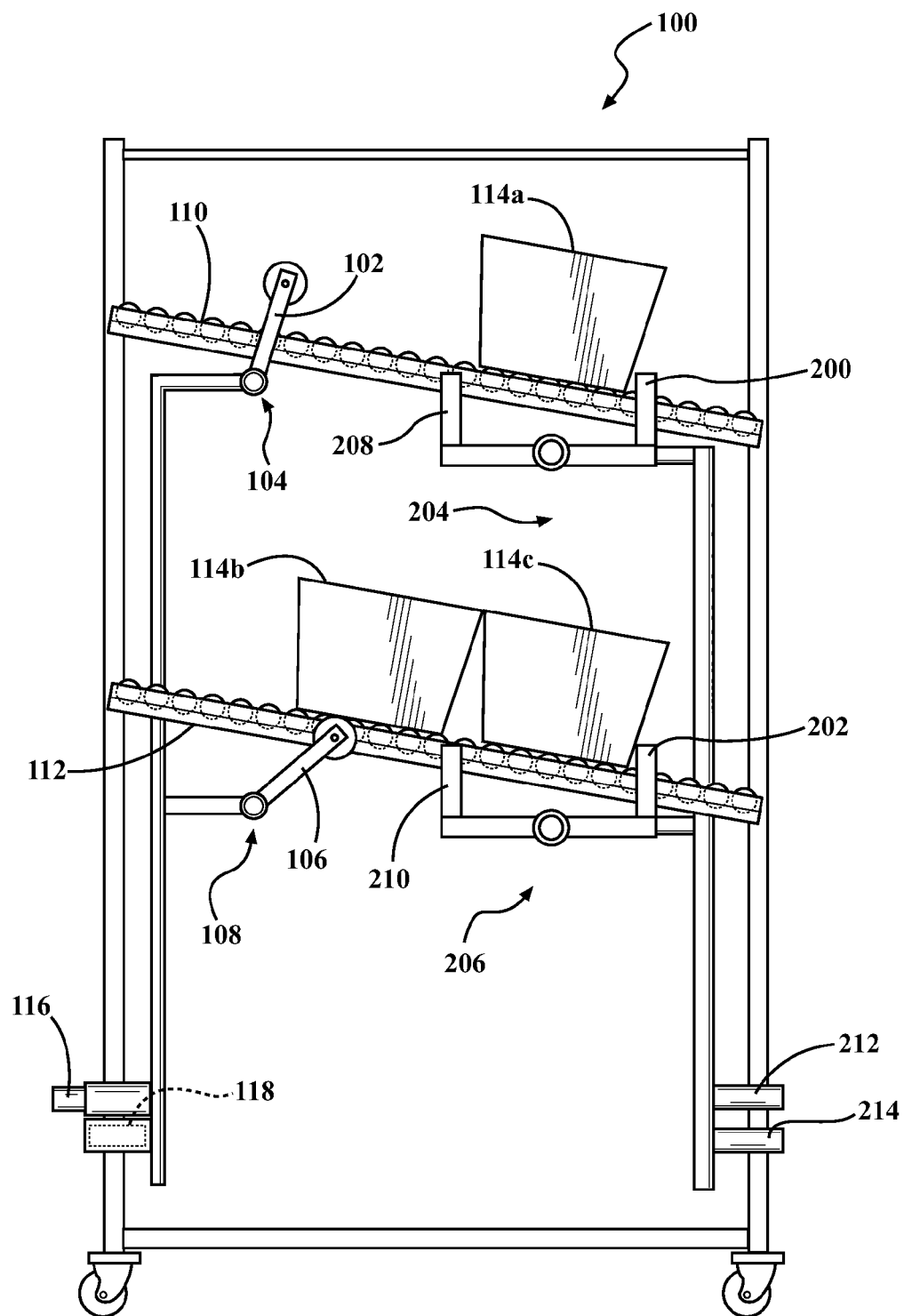


FIG. 1

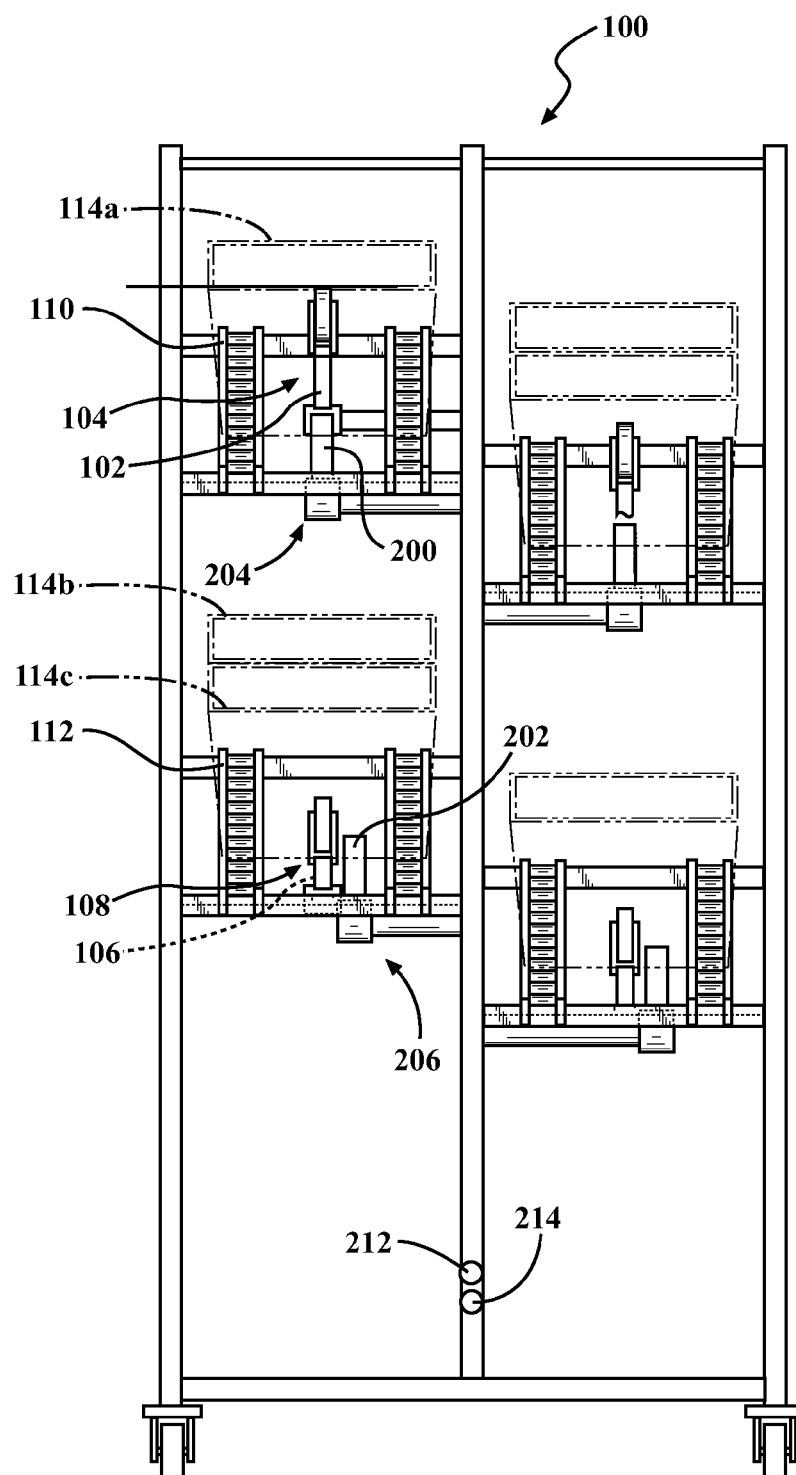


FIG. 2

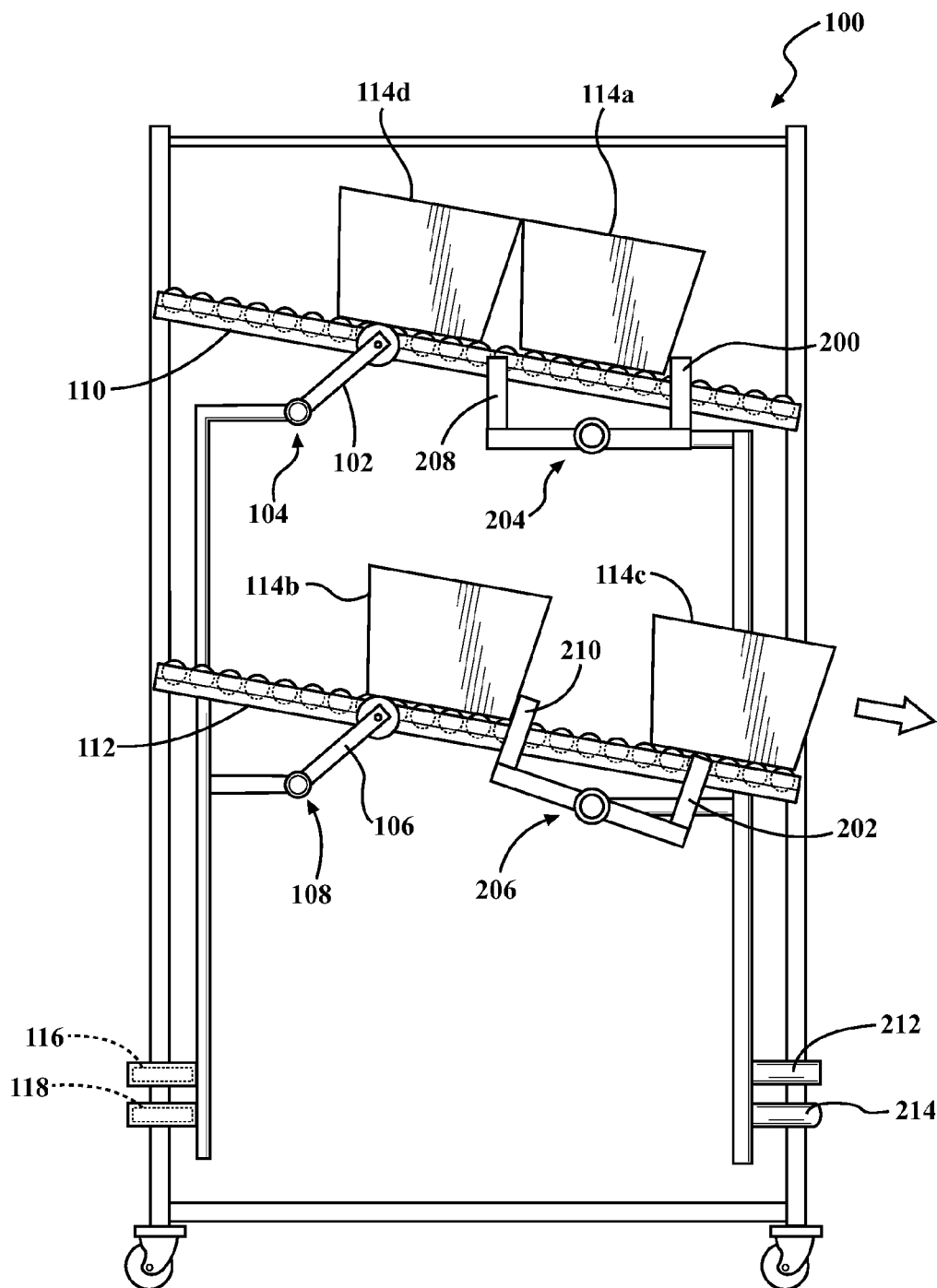


FIG. 3

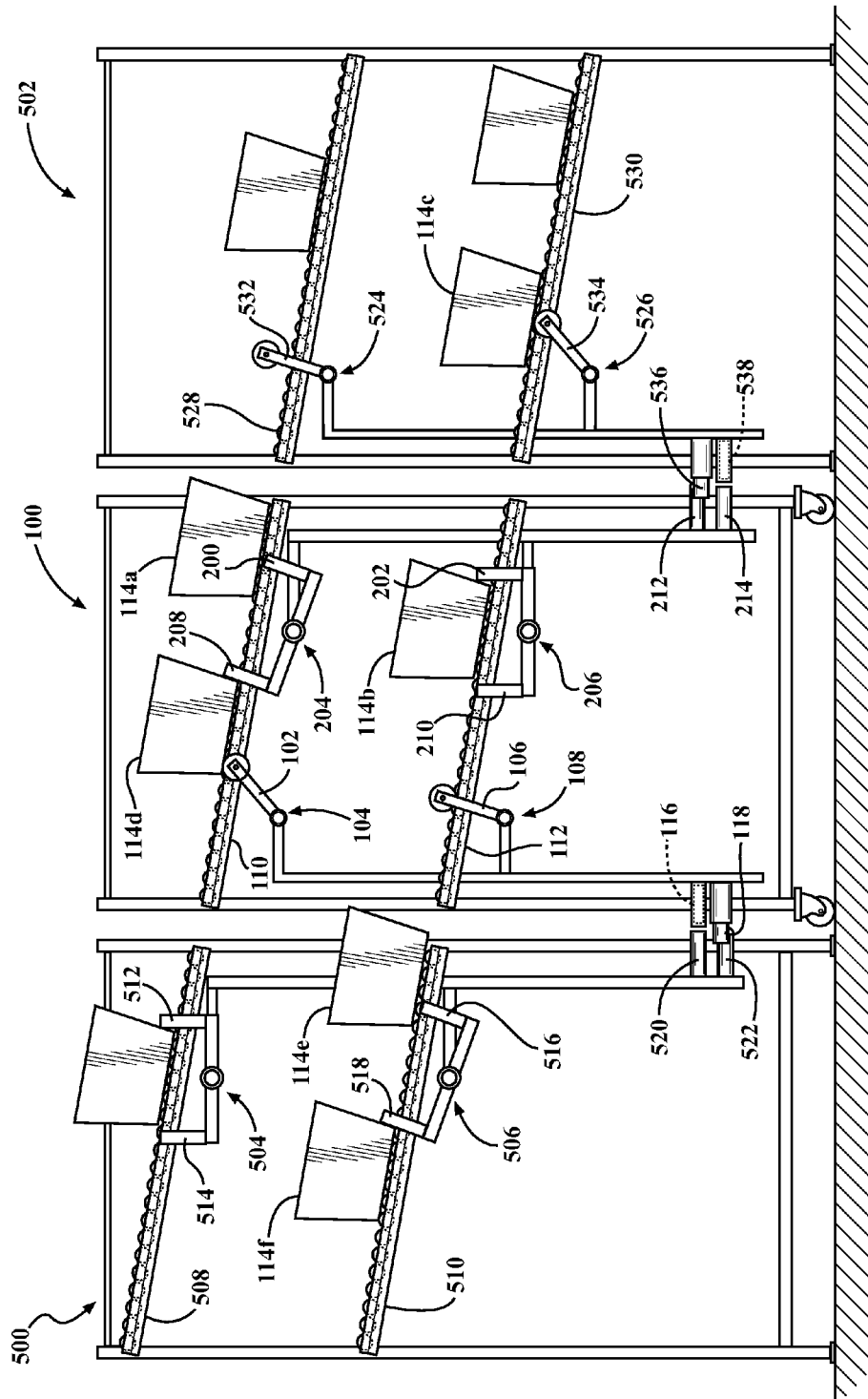


FIG. 4

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MOBILE INVENTORY RACK APPARATUS AND INVENTORY RACK SYSTEM

BACKGROUND

The manufacturing and assembly process for vehicles requires workers to install various parts to the vehicle as the vehicle moves along an assembly line. The supply of these parts, or inventory, must be replenished during the assembly process, with some parts requiring replenishment more often than others. The frequency of replenishment can depend on the storage area allotted to the parts adjacent to the installation location along the assembly line, the size of the parts, the quantity of the parts used per vehicle, and how many vehicles traveling the assembly line require use of the specific parts.

Traditional part-replenishment systems can include delivery of inventory according to a detailed schedule or delivery of inventory upon specific request by workers on the assembly line. Parts can be delivered, for example, by forklift drivers or automated guided vehicles (AGVs) traveling between an inventory storage location and the various stations of the assembly line requiring the specified parts. Schedule-based delivery systems can be overly complicated to manage, and request-based delivery systems can cause delays along the assembly line. A better part-replenishment system for supplying inventory is thus required to improve the manufacturing and assembly process.

SUMMARY

A mobile inventory rack apparatus serving as part of an inventory rack system is disclosed. The mobile inventory rack apparatus can receive articles of inventory on an as-needed basis from a stationary supply rack apparatus and deliver articles of inventory on an as-needed basis to a receiver rack apparatus located adjacent to the assembly line for a vehicle. The mobile inventory rack apparatus can include an inventory conveyor designed to receive an article of inventory when a requirement indicator has an inventory required state as denoted by the lack of contact with an article of inventory. The mobile inventory rack apparatus can also supply articles of inventory by repositioning a set of paired stoppers that prevent translation of the articles of inventory to allow at least one article of inventory to be removed from the inventory conveyor when a supply lever is contacted by a requirement pin extending from a receiver rack apparatus.

In one implementation, a mobile inventory rack apparatus is disclosed. The mobile inventory rack apparatus includes an inventory conveyor configured to translate articles of inventory and a receiving system including a requirement indicator disposed along the inventory conveyor. The requirement indicator has an inventory required state when not in contact with an article of inventory. The mobile inventory rack apparatus further includes a supply system including a pair of spaced stoppers disposed along the inventory conveyor. Each stopper has an extended position preventing translation of the articles of inventory and a retracted position allowing translation of the articles of inventory. The inventory conveyor is configured to receive at least one article of inventory when the requirement indicator is in the inventory required state and to allow removal of at least one article of inventory when one of the stoppers is in the retracted position.

In another implementation, an inventory rack system is disclosed. The inventory rack system includes a supply rack apparatus and a mobile inventory rack apparatus. The supply rack apparatus includes a supply system. The supply system includes a pair of spaced stoppers disposed along a supply

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conveyor, each stopper having an extended position preventing translation of articles of inventory and a retracted position allowing translation of the articles of inventory. The supply system also includes a supply lever extending from the supply rack apparatus configured to switch the positions of both of the spaced stoppers. The mobile inventory rack apparatus includes a receiving system. The receiving system includes a requirement indicator disposed along an inventory conveyor, the requirement indicator having an inventory required state when not in contact with an article of inventory. The receiving system also includes a requirement pin extending from the mobile inventory rack apparatus when the requirement indicator is in the inventory required state. The inventory conveyor is configured to receive at least one article of inventory from the supply conveyor in response to the requirement pin of the mobile inventory rack apparatus being contacted by the supply lever of the supply rack apparatus.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The description herein makes reference to the accompanying drawings wherein like reference numerals refer to like parts throughout the several views, and wherein:

FIG. 1 is a side view of a mobile inventory rack apparatus;

FIG. 2 is an end view of the mobile inventory rack apparatus of FIG. 1;

FIG. 3 is another side view of the mobile inventory rack apparatus of FIG. 1; and

FIG. 4 is a side sectional view of an inventory rack system including a supply rack apparatus, the mobile inventory rack apparatus of FIGS. 1-3, and a receiver rack apparatus.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

A mobile inventory rack apparatus and an inventory rack system including the mobile inventory rack apparatus are described below. The mobile inventory rack apparatus can include at least one inventory conveyor configured to translate articles of inventory. The mobile inventory rack apparatus can deliver the articles of inventory from an inventory source to a line-side storage location for use in a vehicle assembly process. To accomplish delivery on an as-needed basis, the mobile inventory rack apparatus can include a receiving system including a requirement indicator that has an inventory required state only when not in contact with an article of inventory and a supply system preventing translation of articles of inventory until a supply lever on the mobile inventory rack apparatus is contacted by a requirement pin on a receiver rack apparatus located at the line-side storage location.

FIG. 1 is a side view of a mobile inventory rack apparatus 100. The mobile inventory rack apparatus 100 described below can move through an assembly plant, either automatically if controlled by an AGV or manually if controlled by an operator. The mobile inventory rack apparatus 100 can be driven adjacent to a stationary supply rack apparatus in order to receive new inventory as needed and be driven adjacent to a stationary receiver rack apparatus to deliver inventory as needed to various stations on an assembly line. The mobile inventory rack apparatus 100 thus facilitates part delivery to the assembly line without the need for either scheduling deliveries or manually requesting parts.

To facilitate receipt of new inventory on an as-needed basis, the mobile inventory rack apparatus 100 includes a requirement indicator 102 as part of an upper conveyor receiving system 104 shown in an inventory required state and a requirement indicator 106 as part of a lower conveyor

receiving system **108** shown in an inventory not required state. The upper conveyor receiving system **104** of the mobile inventory rack apparatus **100** (including the requirement indicator **102**) is disposed along an upper inventory conveyor **110**, and the lower conveyor receiving system **108** (including the requirement indicator **106**) is disposed along a lower inventory conveyor **112**.

The two inventory conveyors **110**, **112** are configured to translate articles of inventory within containers, such as boxes **114a-c**, from one side of the mobile inventory rack apparatus **100** to the other side. In this example, the boxes **114a-c** are designed to hold vehicle parts, i.e. inventory, for use in the vehicle assembly process. Though the mobile inventory rack apparatus **100** is described here in the context of part delivery for a vehicle assembly line, it is also possible to use the mobile inventory rack apparatus **100** in other delivery contexts, such as in grocery stores or warehouses. Further, though two inventory conveyors **110**, **112** are shown, any number of inventory conveyors can be included as part of the mobile inventory rack apparatus **100** since the design is scalable. Each inventory conveyor **110**, **112** can be configured to deliver different types of parts on an as-needed schedule given the design of the delivery mechanisms described below.

The inventory conveyors **110**, **112** can be sloped in order to use gravity to assist in translation of the boxes **114a-c** and can optionally include spaced roller channels to further assist in translation. The requirement indicators **102**, **106** can be disposed between the spaced roller channels and are designed to collapse beneath the boxes **114a-c** upon contact with the boxes **114a-c** in order to indicate the inventory not required state. The requirement indicators **102**, **106** can include rollers at distal ends for ease of collapse upon contact. In the example shown in FIG. 1, the requirement indicator **106** has an inventory not required state, i.e., no inventory is required to be added to the lower inventory conveyor **112**, since the requirement indicator **106** is in contact with and has collapsed beneath the box **114b**. The requirement indicator **102** is not in contact with anything and is positioned upright between the spaced roller channels of the upper inventory conveyor **110**. Thus, the requirement indicator **102** has an inventory required state, that is, the upper inventory conveyor **110** is ready to receive an additional article of inventory, e.g. another box of parts.

The upper conveyor receiving system **104** further includes a requirement pin **116** configured to extend from the mobile inventory rack apparatus **100** when the requirement indicator **102** is in the inventory required state as shown. The extension of the requirement pin **116** is based on the upright position of the requirement indicator **102** and the lack of contact with an article of inventory. The requirement pin **116** and the requirement indicator **102** can be joined, for example, by a cable and/or lever system as part of the upper conveyor receiving system **104**. The upper inventory conveyor **110** can be designed to receive at least one article of inventory, for example, another box of parts, from a supply rack apparatus in response to the requirement pin **116** being contacted by a supply lever extending from the supply rack apparatus when the mobile inventory rack apparatus **100** passes by the supply rack apparatus.

The lower conveyor receiving system **108** also includes a requirement pin **118**, the requirement pin **118** having a retracted position shown in dotted line based on the requirement indicator **106** having an inventory not required state. The retracted position of the requirement pin **118** is thus based on the collapsed position of the requirement indicator **106** below and in contact with the box **114b**. Since the requirement pin **118** is in the retracted position, a correspond-

ing supply lever on a supply rack apparatus will not be able to contact the requirement pin **118**, and no parts will be transferred to the lower inventory conveyor **112** when the mobile inventory rack apparatus **100** passes by the supply rack apparatus.

The mobile inventory rack apparatus **100** also includes stoppers **200**, **202** at the end of the inventory conveyors **110**, **112** forming part of an upper conveyor supply system **204** and a lower conveyor supply system **206**. When in an extended position as shown, the stoppers **200**, **202** prevent translation of articles of inventory. The upper conveyor supply system **204** includes the stopper **200** as part of a pair of spaced stoppers **200**, **208** disposed along the upper inventory conveyor **110**. Similarly, the lower conveyor supply system **206** includes the stopper **202** as part of another pair of spaced stoppers **202**, **210** disposed along the lower inventory conveyor **112**. Each of the stoppers **200**, **202**, **208**, **210** has an extended position preventing translation of articles of inventory and a retracted position allowing translation of articles of inventory.

For example, the extended position of the stopper **200** in the upper conveyor supply system **204** is preventing the box **114a** from sliding off of the upper inventory conveyor **110**. Similarly, the extended position of the stopper **202** in the lower conveyor supply system **206** is preventing the box **114c** from sliding off of the lower inventory conveyor **112**. In the example shown in FIG. 1, the stoppers **200**, **208** are paired, or coupled, in that the extension of the stopper **200** leads to the retraction of the stopper **208**. Similarly, the stoppers **202**, **210** are paired, and the extension of the stopper **202** leads to the retraction of the stopper **210**. The paired extension and retraction can be accomplished using a lever system and common axes of rotation for the connected pairs of stoppers **200**, **208** and **202**, **210**. The mechanisms shown are similar in function to a see-saw, though other mechanical, hydraulic, or electric mechanisms for paired extension and retraction are also possible.

The upper conveyor supply system **204** further includes a supply lever **212** configured to switch the positions of both of the spaced stoppers **200**, **208** when contacted by a requirement pin extending from a receiver rack apparatus. Similarly, the lower conveyor supply system **206** further includes a supply lever **214** configured to switch the positions of both of the spaced stoppers **202**, **210** when contacted by a requirement pin extending from a receiver rack apparatus. Once the supply levers **212**, **214** are contacted by the applicable requirement pins, the stoppers **200**, **202** can be retracted, and the boxes **114a,c** can be automatically released from the respective inventory conveyors **110**, **112**. The spacing between the paired stoppers **200**, **208** and **202**, **210** is such that a single article of inventory can be positioned along the inventory conveyors **110**, **112** between the sets of paired stoppers **200**, **208** and **202**, **210**. However, the spacing can be such that any number of articles of inventory can be designed to be released from the respective inventory conveyors **110**, **112** upon retraction of the respective stoppers **200**, **202**.

FIG. 2 is an end view of the mobile inventory rack apparatus **100** of FIG. 1, more specifically, a right-end view of FIG. 1. In this view, the supply levers **212**, **214** are shown in a stacked vertical condition, with the supply lever **212** directly above the supply lever **214**. The boxes **114a-c** are shown in dotted line so that the details of the conveyor receiving systems **104**, **108** and the conveyor supply systems **204**, **206** located along the inventory conveyors **110**, **112** are visible. This right-end view is included to show that additional inventory conveyors (not numbered) can be present as part of the mobile inventory rack apparatus **100**, for example, in the form

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of another column of two inventory conveyors located to the right of the inventory conveyors **110**, **112**. Thus, the example in FIG. 2 is a mobile inventory rack apparatus **100** capable of receiving and supplying four different types of inventory. The remainder of the description refers only to the left side of the mobile inventory rack apparatus **100** of FIG. 2 for simplicity, but it is understood that the mechanisms associated with the inventory conveyors **110**, **112** can also be implemented with additional inventory conveyors forming a larger mobile inventory rack apparatus **100**. Thus, the design is scalable.

FIG. 3 is another side view of the mobile inventory rack apparatus **100** of FIG. 1. In this example, the requirement indicators **102**, **106** of both the upper conveyor receiving system **104** and the lower conveyor receiving system **108** have an inventory not required state. As compared to FIG. 1, another box **114d** of parts has been received on the upper inventory conveyor **110**, thus both the upper inventory conveyor **110** and the lower inventory conveyor **112** are full, with the boxes **114a** and **114d** located on the upper inventory conveyor **110** and the boxes **114b** and **114c** located on the lower inventory conveyor **112**.

Once received on the upper inventory conveyor **110**, the box **114d** makes contact with the requirement indicator **102**, moving the requirement indicator **102** beneath the box **114d** as shown. The box **114b** remains in contact with the requirement indicator **106**. Given the presence of the boxes **114b**, **114d** in contact with the requirement indicators **102**, **106**, both of the requirement pins **116**, **118** are in the retracted state, indicating that no additional inventory is currently required by the mobile inventory rack apparatus **100**. If the mobile inventory rack apparatus **100** passes a supply rack apparatus in this configuration, no articles of inventory will be transferred from the supply rack apparatus to the mobile inventory rack apparatus **100**.

In FIG. 3, the stopper **202** in the pair of spaced stoppers **202**, **210** in the lower conveyor supply system **206** has a retracted position allowing translation of an article of inventory, i.e. box **114c**, from the lower inventory conveyor **112**. The supply lever **214** has been contacted by a requirement pin extending from a receiver rack apparatus, leading to the rotated state of the supply lever **214** as shown. In response to the supply lever **214** being contacted and rotated, the stopper **202** was retracted at the same time that the stopper **210** was extended. This coordinated motion is achieved by coupling the motion of the paired stoppers **202**, **210** to the motion of the supply lever **214**, using, for example, a combination of cables and levers. Once the stopper **202** is retracted, the box **114c** can slide from the lower inventory conveyor **112** to, for example, a receiver rack apparatus. The sliding motion of the box **114c** is indicated by an arrow.

At the same time that the box **114c** is released by the retraction of the stopper **202**, the box **114b** is halted by the extension of the stopper **210**. In this example, the stopper **210** extends into the space between the boxes **114b** and **114c** to stop the motion of the box **114b**, but if no space is present between the boxes **114b** and **114c**, the stopper **210** can be designed to impact the bottom of the box **114b** to stop its motion while the box **114c** slides off of the lower inventory conveyor **112**. Thus, the spacing of the paired stoppers **202**, **210** controls the number of articles of inventory that are released from the lower inventory conveyor **112** upon contact with the supply lever **214**.

The paired stoppers **202**, **210** can also include a counter-weight return mechanism. Once the appropriate number of articles of inventory is released, in this example, just the single box **114c**, the stopper **202** can return to its extended position and the leftmost stopper **210** can return to its

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retracted position, allowing the box **114b** to slide down the lower inventory conveyor **112** to rest at the stopper **202**. In turn, the requirement indicator **106** will be released from contact with the box **114b** to return to the inventory required state extending up through the lower inventory conveyor **112**, and the requirement pin **118** will be triggered to extend from the mobile inventory rack apparatus **100**.

The same supply mechanisms described in respect to the lower inventory conveyor **112** are present on the upper inventory conveyor **110**. That is, the paired stoppers **200**, **208** are coupled to the supply lever **212**. Contact made with the supply lever **212** will retract the stopper **200** and allow removal of the box **114a** while at the same time extending the stopper **208** and stopping translation of the box **114d** just until removal of the box **114a** is complete and the counter-weight mechanism returns the stopper **200** to the extended position and the stopper **208** to the retracted position. At this point, the box **114d** will be free to slide into contact with the stopper **200** and the requirement indicator **102** will be released, allowing extension of the requirement pin **116** indicating the inventory required state for the upper conveyor receiving system **104**. The mobile inventory rack apparatus **100** described in the preceding figures is further described as part of an inventory rack system below.

FIG. 4 is a side sectional view of an inventory rack system including a supply rack apparatus **500**, the mobile inventory rack apparatus **100** of FIGS. 1-3, and a receiver rack apparatus **502**. The supply rack apparatus **500** includes a pair of supply systems **504**, **506** each disposed along a supply conveyor **508**, **510** and including a pair of spaced stoppers **512**, **514** and **516**, **518**. Each stopper **512**, **514**, **516**, **518** has an extended position preventing translation of articles of inventory and a retracted position allowing translation of articles of inventory. The upper pair of spaced stoppers **512**, **514** is coupled to a supply lever **520** extending from the supply rack apparatus **500** and the lower pair of spaced stoppers **516**, **518** is coupled to a supply lever **522** extending from the supply rack apparatus **500**. The supply levers **520**, **522** are configured to switch the positions of the respective spaced stoppers **512**, **514** and **516**, **518** upon contact, for example, between retracted and extended positions.

In the example shown in FIG. 4, the supply lever **522** is being contacted by the requirement pin **118** of the mobile inventory rack apparatus **100**, and the stopper **516** is consequently retracted, allowing box **114c** to move from the supply rack apparatus **500** to the mobile inventory rack apparatus **100**. At the same time, the stopper **518** is extended, impeding the motion of box **114f** until the transfer of the box **114c** is complete. The supply lever **520** is not contacted by the corresponding requirement pin **116** because the requirement pin **116** is retracted based on the presence of the box **114d** in contact with the requirement indicator **102** on the upper inventory conveyor **110** of the mobile inventory rack apparatus **100**.

The receiver rack apparatus **502** includes a pair of receiving systems **524**, **526** each disposed along a receiver conveyor **528**, **530** and including a requirement indicator **532**, **534**. The requirement indicators **532**, **534** have inventory required states when not in contact with an article of inventory and inventory not required states when in contact with an article of inventory. The receiving systems **524**, **526** further include requirement pins **536**, **538** configured to extend from the receiver rack apparatus **502** when the requirement indicators **532**, **534** are in the inventory required state. In this example, the box **114c** was previously transferred to the receiver conveyor **530** by the mobile inventory rack apparatus **100** and is now in contact with the requirement indicator **534**. Conse-

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quently, the related requirement pin **538** is retracted and does not contact the supply lever **214** of the mobile inventory rack apparatus **100**. Thus, no articles of inventory will be transferred between the lower inventory conveyor **112** and the receiver conveyor **530**.

The example shown in FIG. **4** has the requirement indicator **532** in a position extending upright through the receiver conveyor **528**, making no contact with any articles of inventory. Thus, the requirement pin **536** is extended from the receiver rack apparatus **502** and can contact the supply lever **212** when the mobile inventory rack apparatus **100** travels by the receiver rack apparatus **502**. Upon contact between the requirement pin **536** and the supply lever **212**, the stopper **200** located on the upper inventory conveyor **110** is retracted, and the box **114a** can transfer between the upper inventory conveyor **110** and the receiver conveyor **528**. At the same time, the stopper **208** extends to impede motion of the box **114d** until the transfer of the box **114a** is complete. Once the box **114a** transfers from the mobile inventory rack apparatus **100** to the receiver rack apparatus **502**, the box **114a** will contact the requirement indicator **532** which in turn will retract the requirement pin **536**, indicating that the receiver conveyor **528** is full.

The mobile inventory rack apparatus **100** described in the preceding figures allows for as-needed supply of inventory between an inventory source, such as the stationary supply rack apparatus **500**, and assembly stations on the assembly line that include limited storage for inventory, such as the receiver rack apparatus **502**, each shown in FIG. **4**. Though not shown in the figures, the mobile inventory rack apparatus **100** can also be designed to receive receptacles for articles of inventory, for example, empty boxes, from the assembly stations and return the empty boxes back to the inventory source to be refilled using either the same receiving systems and supply systems described above, or simplified receiving systems and supply systems designed for empty box return, but designed in a reverse direction.

The foregoing description relates to what are presently considered to be the most practical embodiments. It is to be understood, however, that the disclosure is not to be limited to these embodiments but, on the contrary, is intended to cover various modifications and equivalent arrangements included within the spirit and scope of the appended claims, which scope is to be accorded the broadest interpretation so as to encompass all such modifications and equivalent structures as is permitted under the law.

What is claimed is:

1. A mobile inventory rack apparatus, comprising:
an inventory conveyor configured to translate articles of inventory; and
a receiving system including:

a requirement indicator disposed along the inventory conveyor, the requirement indicator having an inventory required state when not in contact with an article of inventory; and
a requirement pin configured to extend from the mobile inventory rack apparatus when the requirement indicator is in the inventory required state;

wherein the inventory conveyor is configured to receive at least one article of inventory from a supply rack apparatus in response to the requirement pin being contacted by a supply lever extending from the supply rack apparatus when the requirement indicator is in the inventory required state.

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2. The mobile inventory rack apparatus of claim **1**, wherein the inventory conveyor includes spaced roller channels and the requirement indicator is disposed between the spaced roller channels.

3. The mobile inventory rack apparatus of claim **1**, wherein the requirement indicator has an inventory not required state when in contact with an article of inventory.

4. The mobile inventory rack apparatus of claim **3**, wherein the inventory conveyor is configured to not receive any articles of inventory when the requirement indicator is in the inventory not required state.

5. The mobile inventory rack apparatus of claim **3**, wherein the requirement indicator is configured to collapse beneath the article of inventory in the inventory not required state.

6. The mobile inventory rack apparatus of claim **1**, further comprising:

a supply system including a pair of spaced stoppers disposed along the inventory conveyor, each stopper having an extended position preventing translation of the articles of inventory and a retracted position allowing translation of the articles of inventory;

wherein the inventory conveyor is configured to allow removal of at least one article of inventory when one of the stoppers is in the retracted position.

7. The mobile inventory rack apparatus of claim **6**, wherein the inventory conveyor includes spaced roller channels and the spaced stoppers are disposed between the spaced roller channels.

8. The mobile inventory rack apparatus of claim **6**, wherein the supply system further includes a supply lever configured to switch the positions of both of the spaced stoppers when contacted by a requirement pin extending from a receiver rack apparatus.

9. The mobile inventory rack apparatus of claim **8**, wherein at least one article of inventory is removed from the inventory conveyor in response to the supply lever being contacted by the requirement pin extending from the receiver rack apparatus.

10. The mobile inventory rack apparatus of claim **6**, wherein at least one article of inventory can be positioned along the inventory conveyor between the spaced stoppers.

11. An inventory rack system, comprising:

a supply rack apparatus, comprising:

a supply system, including:

a pair of spaced stoppers disposed along a supply conveyor, each stopper having an extended position preventing translation of articles of inventory and a retracted position allowing translation of the articles of inventory; and

a supply lever extending from the supply rack apparatus and configured to switch the positions of both of the spaced stoppers; and

a mobile inventory rack apparatus, comprising:

a receiving system, including:

a requirement indicator disposed along an inventory conveyor, the requirement indicator having an inventory required state when not in contact with an article of inventory; and

a requirement pin extending from the mobile inventory rack apparatus when the requirement indicator is in the inventory required state;

wherein the inventory conveyor is configured to receive at least one article of inventory from the supply conveyor in response to the requirement pin of the mobile inventory rack apparatus being contacted by the supply lever of the supply rack apparatus.

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12. The inventory rack system of claim 11, wherein the supply conveyor and the inventory conveyor are configured to translate articles of inventory using spaced roller channels.

13. The inventory rack system of claim 12, wherein the spaced stoppers are disposed between the spaced roller channels of the supply conveyor and the requirement indicator is disposed between the spaced roller channels of the inventory conveyor.

14. The inventory rack system of claim 11, wherein the mobile inventory rack apparatus further includes:

a supply system, including:

a pair of spaced stoppers disposed along the inventory conveyor, each stopper having an extended position preventing translation of articles of inventory and a retracted position allowing translation of the articles of inventory; and

a supply lever extending from the mobile inventory rack apparatus and configured to switch the positions of both of the spaced stoppers.

15. The inventory rack system of claim 14, further comprising:

a receiver rack apparatus, comprising:

a receiving system, including:

a requirement indicator disposed along a receiver conveyor, the requirement indicator having an inventory required state when not in contact with an article of inventory; and

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a requirement pin extending from the receiver rack apparatus when the requirement indicator is in the inventory required state;

wherein the receiver conveyor is configured to receive at least one article of inventory from the inventory conveyor in response to the requirement pin of the receiver rack apparatus being contacted by the supply lever of the mobile inventory rack apparatus.

16. The inventory rack system of claim 15, wherein the receiver conveyor includes spaced roller channels and the requirement indicator of the receiving system is disposed between the spaced roller channels.

17. The inventory rack system of claim 11, wherein the requirement indicator has an inventory not required state when in contact with an article of inventory.

18. The inventory rack system of claim 17, wherein the inventory conveyor is configured to not receive any articles of inventory from the supply conveyor when the requirement indicator is in the inventory not required state.

19. The inventory rack system of claim 17, wherein the requirement indicator is configured to collapse beneath the article of inventory in the inventory not required state.

20. The inventory rack system of claim 14, wherein at least one article of inventory can be positioned along the inventory conveyor between the spaced stoppers.

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